

Missouri Western State University

Remote Work Procedures

Effective 1/1/2021

Approved by Dr. Elizabeth Kennedy, Interim President

Introduction

Missouri Western State University supports remote work when it meets the needs of the University. Remote work can be helpful in urgent situations by allowing for the continuity of operations. Remote work may be performed at the employee's home or another suitable location. This policy outlines the definitions, eligibility, and processes of applying for and receiving approval to engage in remote work. Key considerations, best practices, and university guidance for the approval of a remote work agreement are discussed.

What is a Remote Work Agreement?

A remote work agreement is an option that allows an employee to work at home or another off-site location, for a specified number of hours per week, month, etc.

Remote work is neither a universal employee right nor a universal employee benefit. Remote work agreements must be mutually agreed to by the employee and direct supervisor, and must be approved by the appropriate Vice President, and may be discontinued by the University at any time.

Remote work may be used as an option when appropriate to meet the needs of the department under special circumstances such as a pandemic, natural disaster, or other reason for campus closure. Remote work is not appropriate for all employees and jobs, nor all employees in the same or similar jobs, and should be considered on a case-by case basis (see more specific considerations below). Remote work may be approved on a time-limited basis.

Direct supervisors are responsible for developing a means of evaluating employee work (including hours, for non-exempt employees) and work performance, and holding those working remotely accountable for the output and quality of work expected. Remote work arrangements, which are by default only of a temporary nature, must be reviewed periodically to determine whether or not the arrangement should continue.

Eligibility

Any Missouri Western State University employee (exempt and non-exempt) whose work does not require face-to-face interaction, or for which that interaction may be scheduled to occur in a different communication format (e.g., telephone, zoom, etc.) , may be eligible to work remotely.

Employees must be able to demonstrate to supervisor:

- Ability to work effectively with minimal supervision; and
- Ability to establish priorities and effectively manage time.

Application for Remote Work Agreement

Remote work agreements must be documented and approved. Consideration and approval of any remote work agreement begins with submission of a [Remote Work Agreement Form](#). Instructions for completing the form and obtaining the necessary approvals are provided below.

Form Instructions

Section 1. Employee Information

- Employee completes Section 1.

Section 2. Reason for Remote Work Request

- Employee completes Section 2.
- Reason for the Remote Work Arrangement must be selected from one of three options as listed in the drop-down menu:
 - Option 1: Self Quarantine/Isolation
 - *Option 1 is selected when an employee has been exposed to or has COVID-19 and is in either quarantine or isolation.*
 - Option 2: Member of Household Quarantine/Isolation
 - *Option 2 is selected when a member of an employee's household has been exposed to or has COVID-19 and the employee is subject to either quarantine or isolation.*
 - Option 3: Other
 - *Option 3 is selected when the employee has other circumstances for which a remote work arrangement is requested. Circumstance must be extenuating and must include a detailed description of why the employee believes his/her job duties cannot be performed on campus. A desire to work remotely without the presence of extenuating circumstances will be not be considered or approved.*

Section 3. Timeframe

- Employee completes Section 3.
- The remote start date and the anticipated end date must accurately reflect the reason for the remote work arrangement request.
 - *Crystal Harris, MWSU COVID Response Coordinator, will communicate with employee their start/end dates for quarantine/isolation (using [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) most up to date guidelines or physician recommendations).*

Section 4. Location

- Employee completes Section 4.
- The physical address of where the remote work location will take place must be listed.
 - *The employee agrees to work at the designated site during the hours specified in the agreement as defined below. Any location change must be approved by the supervisor prior to the employee initiating the location change.*

Section 5. Technology and Accessibility

- Employee completes Section 5.
- Both personal and University equipment to be used as part of an employee's remote work must have up-to-date antivirus software installed and enabled, which includes having an active subscription for anti-virus software that is subscription-based.
- Further considerations include:
 - *Employees who already have assigned university equipment appropriate for remote work (e.g., laptop) may use that equipment to perform their duties remotely. University-owned desktop/tower computers assigned for on-campus works are not to be used for remote work. Further, assignment of additional university equipment above and beyond that required to perform on-campus work (i.e., assignment of a laptop to an employee who routinely works on a university assigned desktop computer) will not be permitted.*

Section 6. Remote Work Schedule

- Employee completes Section 6.
- Enter the hours that will be worked during remote work arrangement.
 - *Non-exempt employees are subject to FLSA regulations. The employee will maintain a record of actual hours worked. Non-exempt employees working 7.5 hours in a row should have a defined meal period.*
- Sign, date, and submit the form.

Section 7. Remote Work Duties, Responsibilities, and Expectations

- Supervisor completes Section 7.
- Describe the specific work assignments to be performed at the remote worksite.
- Identify how employee-supervisor interactions (e.g., follow-up meetings via telephone and/or zoom, etc.) will occur and how evaluation of work assignments (both in terms of timeliness of completion as well as quality of work produced) will be conducted.
 - *Review Supervisor Guidelines and Considerations*
- Sign, date, and submit the form.

Supervisor Guidelines and Considerations

As a supervisor, what are some of the things I should consider?

Supervisors need to determine whether the work that is being done can be accomplished in an equally or more effective manner by utilization of a remote work arrangement. The supervisor should take performance into consideration, the reliability and work styles of their employees, and the constituents who need to be served.

Can hourly employees (non-exempt) work remotely?

Yes, hourly employees can be permitted to work remotely. However, employees and supervisors are still required to comply with all timekeeping and overtime regulations defined by policy. Hourly employees who work remotely are required to be cognizant of these policies and structure their remote work just as they would in a typical workplace. Hourly employees may be managed by results, supervisors must ensure accurate recording of hours worked.

What kind of work may a non-exempt staff member perform remotely?

Remote work is best suited for jobs or tasks that involve reading, writing, research, talking on the phone, and working with data. In general (and at the discretion of supervisors and administration), a job is suited to remote work if some or all of the components can be done off-site without disruption to the flow of work and communication.

Here are some ideas for tasks supervisors might consider appropriate for specific assignment to employees (in addition to the general categories identified above). Remote work should always be directed by supervisors:

- Customer service/response and scheduling: Use tools such as phone twinning and group calendars
- “Back Burner Projects:” Remote work time can be ideal to have your team members tackle delayed projects such as writing manuals or other types of documentation.
- Research: Ask the employee to do benchmarking research on a topic the department is interested in pursuing.
- Planning: Is there planning that needs to occur in your department?
- Data-Crunching: Compile department data to generate reports/metrics.
- Creating instructional or informational modules or videos
- Updating Websites: Review department websites (and other promotional/written materials) for information that needs to be updated.

What types of jobs are not as well suited for remote work?

Employees in positions requiring *in-person* contact/customer service, or that rely upon specific equipment or supplies may not be appropriate candidates for remote work arrangements. Administrative and/or supervisory roles similarly may be excluded from consideration for remote work arrangements if there are employees who cannot work remotely who need to be supervised in person.

What about salaried employees?

Salaried employees are not covered by the overtime and record keeping (e.g. electronic timekeeping) requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Therefore, there is inherent flexibility in work scheduling for those individuals. Even though the law allows this latitude, exempt staff members still need to adhere to the same guidance in establishing what type of work can be done off-site versus on-site. Performance of work can be demonstrated by results.

Managing Employees

Trust is the foundation of a successful remote team, and remote work can even lead to increased productivity. Supervisors need to manage expectations about productivity and start by trusting that every team member is working to the best of their ability during this time.

Supervisors should schedule synchronous conversations with their teams, and one-on-ones as needed, to discuss these expectations and provide opportunities for team members to share updates and concerns.

Communicate News & Decisions

When changes are made to how, when, and where work is getting done, it can be challenging to ensure everyone is kept properly aware of news and any decisions that have been made. Consider how information will flow and what steps may be needed to limit gaps.

Work Space

When working from home or elsewhere, an employee working remotely is responsible for establishing and maintaining an adequate and safe work environment. When working at home or elsewhere, the employee working remotely is responsible for establishing a work environment free of interruptions and distractions that would affect performance.

Children and Other Dependents

Remote workers should not provide primary care during established working hours for children or dependent elders who require a provider's care. Remote work should not be a substitute for ongoing child care needs.

Hours of Work

The employee working remotely will agree with the direct supervisor on the number of days and/or hours of remote work allowed each week, and the work schedule that the remote worker will customarily maintain, along with the manner and frequency of communication. The remote worker will agree to be accessible by phone and electronic means during the agreed work schedule. The remote worker is responsible for recording of work and leave in the same manner as at the primary work location. If at any time during the arranged remote work agreement the employee needs to request a leave of absence (i.e. doctor appointment or illness), the employee should notify the supervisor for approval and complete any necessary documentation (absence report or timesheet); thus, following current university absence policy.

Computer Equipment and Other Work Resources

The employee working remotely may use a University-provided laptop. If University equipment is used, the employee is charged with exercising reasonable care for the equipment and may be held liable for damage caused by negligence. University equipment should not be used for personal or other purposes beyond any incidental personal use it might receive if in the office.

The employee working remotely will otherwise be required to provide their own computer equipment, software and peripherals. An employee using their own personal equipment for remote work acknowledges and releases the University and relevant department(s) from any and all liability.

Whether the employee is using equipment belonging to the employee or the University, the employee shall comply with all relevant University policies on information, confidentiality, data, copyright, and security of property, etc., as well as all precautions and requirements prescribed by Technology Services.

Expenses

Business expenses must be approved by a departmental supervisor and appropriate Vice President before they are incurred and must have proper documentation to support them before they will be reimbursed.

Confidentiality

Employees are entrusted with certain responsibilities and special privileges related to customer and/or employee information. During the course of performing the job requirements one may have access to information that is “confidential” or “non-public.” Employees are responsible for the appropriate steps to protect confidential information. Any unauthorized access, modification, manipulation, destruction, or disclosure of confidential information is a violation of MWSU policy and subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Wellbeing

Encourage all employees, both remote and on-site, to care for their wellbeing. Employees working remotely should factor their wellbeing into their home office set-up by maintaining good posture, working in comfortable lighting, etc. Employees who do not typically work remotely may experience challenges adjusting to a different environment, especially if they are accustomed to working very physically. Loneliness is also a common concern. Physical isolation at home combined with a feeling of work loneliness can be challenging for an employee. Use phone calls and video chats to increase interpersonal interaction.

Unplugging from work can be more challenging for remote workers. Encourage employees to unplug when their work is done and to focus on their self and family care.

Employee Guidelines and Considerations

Employees who work remotely more often learn that working remotely is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following tips will help you get to work while at home.

1. **Define your workspace.** It can be easy to sit on the couch with your laptop and expect to get work done. However, we are creatures of habit and most of us are used to lounging with our laptops to read the news, watch TV, play games and video chat. Establishing a workspace - a home office, kitchen table, desk in a guest room - gives your brain a cue that it is time for work and not play.
2. **Master the basics.**
 - Set up twinning or call forwarding on your office phone. Telephone Services can assist.
 - Learn how to use VPN or other aspects of remote access to the MWSU resources you need; Technology Services can assist.
 - Use Skype, Zoom, and instant messaging options to stay connected with colleagues.
 - Plan for video calls/meetings by making sure you know how to use the technology, and making sure that what appears behind you is appropriate.
3. **Set daily goals, track them and share your progress.** You may be surprised by how differently the work day passes without the comings and goings of an office to break things up or influence what you do next. Start each day of remote work by writing down what you need to achieve and then track your progress. Pay attention to how long tasks take you and start adjusting your daily goals to match your current rhythm. Communicate with your supervisor and/or colleagues if you think your remote work plan needs to be adjusted.

5. **Eliminate distractions.** If home is where your heart is then remote work can mean pets, children or a favorite hobby are only a few feet away. Depending on your living arrangement, you may need to hang a “do not disturb” sign and/or set some ground rules so your family members don’t interrupt you. Pets often need a closed door to keep them away and you might need headphones to block the neighborhood noise.
6. **Prioritize privacy.** Whether you are in your home or a public space, take a few minutes to assess the privacy of your workspace. Can someone standing behind you read your computer screen? Are your windows open so your neighbor can hear your phone call? What information do you need to secure before filling your water bottle or heading to the restroom? Your personal privacy matters too, so see if there is anything around you that you would not want visible during a video conference with your boss.
7. **Stay connected.** Help those at the office remember that you are present. Many people say they do not call or instant message colleagues who are working remotely because they don’t want to bother them! However, they are working, not vacationing at home! You can even keep your daily coffee run – simply plan to call or video chat with a cup in hand at the time your crew would normally walk to your favorite coffee spot.
8. **Dress for work.** Dressing casually is definitely a perk of working at home but getting “ready for work” is a daily ritual that many successful remote workers swear by for staying focused and separating work hours from the rest of the day.

Returning to On-campus Work

An employee whose remote work arrangement is ending must submit with signature a [Return to Work Acknowledgement form](#) (provided by Human Resources) at least two (2) days prior to their scheduled return to work date. Supervisors and vice presidents will be copied for signatures as required.